

Exchange of letters between the Director of INDEC, Argentina and the Chair of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics (ABE), September 2012

On 14 September 2012 the Director of INDEC sent the following letter addresses to the President of the ISI and the Chair of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics:

"I would like to remark some observations in connection with the document entitled "Recent developments concerning the application of the ISI Declaration on Professional Ethics", issued by the ISI (Revised on 9th of September, 2012).

Throughout its history, the Argentine Republic has never been an interventionist country. It's somehow curious that a Non Governmental Organization claims for itself the right of issuing formal statements or propositions that clearly seek to interfere within several internal affairs of the Argentine Nation. Moreover, this situation is even more significant when it is taken into account that such statements or propositions arise from opinions pointed out by professional entities and think-tanks which act in response to specific and well known economic interests.

Our Republic possesses a vast and diversified legal regulatory framework which is the basis for applying Justice in accordance. Even if it may be redundant to mention, it is important to state that such framework is -and must be- perfectly aligned with the principles, rights and guarantees included within the Nation's Fundamental Carta, or National Constitution. It would be interesting to know if the authorities of the ISI understand that they have rights to participate within the correspondent Legislative proceeding in order to, for example, propose the changing of the legal framework effective within the Argentine Republic.

Evidently, under no circumstances any authority or professional members of the ISI could decide the convenience of any international revision connected with the official statistical data produced by the Argentine Nation that might be carried out by its allied (so called) "experts". Since the aforementioned Non Governmental Organization seems to have forgotten that the Argentine Republic is a sovereign Nation, it is correct to stress the notion that effective Argentine Statistical Authorities will be the only ones who may take any decision in connection with whatever instance that might occur.

In order to promote a better understanding of the statistical data linked to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of the Gran Buenos Aires conglomerate of the Argentine Republic, the report opportunely sent in occasion of the ASA Meeting in San Diego, USA, is sent again here as an attachment.

Finally, I'd like to point out that we cautiously follow the recent accusations related to eventual interferences on international official statistical data. In particular, we are deeply concerned with the behavior of the ISI in connection with the potential acts linked with the official statistical data related to the Republic of Greece. Because of this and other cases, we consider that the authorities of the ISI do not hold neither the suitability nor both the neutrality and transparency needed in order to point out, as it is done on the aforementioned ISI document, the path that the Argentine National Statistics Institute should follow in the future.

Sincerely,

Ana María Edwin
Directora
Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos"

On 17 September 2012, the Chair of the ISI Advisory Board on Ethics sent the following reply to Ms Edwin:

"Dear Ms Edwin

Thank you for your letter of 14 September and the Attachments. I disagree with some of the points you have made and I thought I should explain the reasons why.

First, I should explain the status of the paper to which I refer. It is not an official ISI statement. It has not been approved by the ISI Executive. It is a paper prepared by Hallgrimur Snorrason and myself to facilitate discussion at a meeting during the recent International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS) Conference to discuss the roles of ISI and IAOS where we believe there are ethical issues associated with official statistics.

Second, I disagree with your view that NGOs should not comment on the activities of individual countries. In fact, “monitoring and advocacy”, both globally and nationally, can be the prime objective of NGOs. The ISI’s main objective is to facilitate professional development in official statistics but it does have an approved code of professional ethics which provides the framework for its activities around ethical issues. Even though it is not the ISI’s prime objective, we do from time to time get involved in advocacy activities based on this framework.

Third, of course we recognise that it is the responsibility of sovereign nations to implement their legislative frameworks as they deem fit. That should not preclude NGOs and others from commenting if they are concerned with the implications. Our interest in Argentina is driven by the fact that there are statisticians in Argentina who we believe are being unfairly treated for upholding ethical principles in the compilation of official statistics. We will continue to advocate on this issue until we believe this is no longer the case.

Yours sincerely

Dennis Trewin
Chair
Advisory Board on Ethics
International Statistical Institute”